

GAINSBOROUGH



26 B

B228984

\$30-





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016



GAINSBOROUGH'S BLUE BOY

A MONOGRAPH

BY

WILLIAM H. FULLER



NEW YORK

1898





THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH, R.A.

1727—1788.

The Blue Boy.

Height, 71½ inches. Width, 50½ inches.

SUPERLATIVE qualities of style, of distinction, of life, no less than accompanying charms of color and of execution, belong to this picture and place it easily among the masterpieces of portraiture of any school and any period. It marks the apogee of Gainsborough's career, for it possesses the most precious characteristics of this eminent artist's work and reflects all the magic of his genius. Like other notable portraits which might be cited, it is, first of all, very simple in arrangement and is fascinating for the very reason of its direct and frank treatment. The youthful subject, dressed in a so-called Vandyke costume of blue silk, has been painted in an attitude of unstudied grace, facing the spectator, his left leg slightly in advance of the right, which supports the weight of the body. His right arm—the hand holding a large hat with white feather—hangs nearly straight by his side; the left hand is hidden in the folds of a short cloak, which it holds against the left hip. Rich lace at the neck and wrist, and delicate lines of embroidery at the

edge of the closely buttoned, short-waisted jacket embellish this garment, and the soft folds of a lawn shirt are seen at the bend of the arm and at the waist. Lace-trimmed garters fasten the white silk stockings at the knee, and bows of the same material adorn the shoes. The color of this costume is always described as blue, and rightly so, although it has a peculiar and unique quality which may be more accurately designated as a composite tone of warm green blue. It has the depth and refinement of some of the similar tones found in oriental porcelains. The head of the boy is rich and glowing in color, solid in modelling, and, moreover, is drawn with extraordinary precision and force. The type of face is impressive in its refinement and in the pure boyishness of expression. The vivacious but limpid eyes under the angles of the delicately moulded eyebrows; the fine, straight nose; the firm and sensitive mouth, almost feminine in its sweetness—each and every feature has, indeed, unusual charm. Behind the figure, and enveloping it in full, warm tones, a landscape is broadly suggested, with great vaporous clouds, trees in full foliage, and a gleam of light along the low horizon. The whole picture is enveloped in a soft, mellow tone.

FRANK D. MILLET, N.A.

GAINSBOROUGH'S BLUE BOY.

(From the Collection of Sir Joseph Hawley.)

It is a matter of great regret that no satisfactory life of Thomas Gainsborough has yet been written. That regret is all the greater because there is little likelihood that such a life will ever be written. The material that Gainsborough left behind him which can be used for such a purpose is so meagre that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to give to the world an adequate idea of the personality and career of this rarely gifted man. This is all the more inexplicable when we consider the rank he held among his contemporaries and the influence his paintings had upon the future English School of Art. Sir Joshua Reynolds said of him :

“If ever this nation should produce genius sufficient to acquire to us the honourable distinction of an English School, the name of Gainsborough will be transmitted to posterity, in the history of the art, among the very first of that rising name.” *

* Beechy's “Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds” (London, 1879), vol. ii., p. 80.

Although Gainsborough shared, if indeed he did not equally divide, the honors of successful portraiture with Sir Joshua, he had this additional distinction, that he was also a landscape painter without a peer. And yet, while the whole career of Reynolds, from boyhood down to the day when his remains were laid in the crypt of St. Paul's, is an open book, much of the life of his great rival will forever remain in obscurity.

Mr. Walter Armstrong says :

“Literature has made the career of Reynolds no less familiar than those of his friends, Johnson, Burke, or Goldsmith. How is it, then, that a modern writer finds it so difficult to gather facts for a sufficient monograph of Gainsborough?”*

If, then, so much difficulty is encountered in preparing an adequate life of the great painter, what will be said of an attempt to trace the life of his pictures? The undertaking is rendered all the more difficult from the fact, that Gainsborough never signed or dated his pictures. Happily, in the case of the painting whose lineage is mainly the subject of this monograph, the task is less discouraging than would attend the history of the great majority of his works. In the course of the discussion, another picture will be brought under consideration—a picture called the

* “Thomas Gainsborough,” by Walter Armstrong, Director of the National Gallery of Ireland. (London, 1894.)

“Blue Boy,” now in the possession of the Duke of Westminster; and, as both paintings are similar in size and subject, the question will naturally arise, Which picture is the original “Blue Boy” of Thomas Gainsborough? In answering that question it must be remembered that we are dealing with paintings probably more than one hundred and twenty years old; that the evidence concerning them is not always direct and conclusive; that at times it is circumstantial; nevertheless, sufficient testimony has been found to enable one to form a reasonable judgment as to the lineage and the relative merits of the two pictures. That Gainsborough should have painted two pictures of this subject—one a replica of the other—is not without precedent by the artists of his day.* No less a man than Sir Joshua Reynolds painted more than one replica of his celebrated “Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse.” The best known are the one now in the Dulwich College Gallery † and the other (of nearly the same size) in the possession of the Duke of Westminster. ‡

* “Gainsborough probably painted more than one ‘Blue Boy.’” Cosmo Monkhouse, in the “Dictionary of National Biography,” vol. xx., p. 364.

† “Canvas 7 ft. 9 in. x 4 ft. 9 in. Catalogue of the Pictures in the Gallery of Alleyn’s College of God’s Gift at Dulwich, 1892.”

‡ “There is an excellent replica of the picture at Langley Park, Stowe, the seat of Mr. Harvey, M.P., given by Sir Joshua to Mr. Harvey’s grandfather, in exchange for a large ‘Boar-hunt’ by Snyders, which Sir Joshua admired, and which used to hang in the place now filled by

Gainsborough himself painted four replicas of his famous picture "The Girl and Pigs." This picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1782, and Leslie says it was "Gainsborough's masterpiece of the year."* It was purchased by Sir Joshua Reynolds for one hundred guineas, although Gainsborough's price was only sixty. The original "Girl and Pigs" is now in the possession of Lord Carlisle, at Castle Howard.†

It is the purpose of this monograph to throw as much light as possible upon the lineage of these two "Blue Boy" pictures, and to leave the question of probable priority of painting to the sound judgment of thoughtful and intelligent readers.

the 'Tragic Muse.' This is certainly the finest example of the picture after the original in the Grosvenor Gallery. The Dulwich replica (which is the one marked in Sir Joshua's account as sold to Mr. Desenfans in June, 1789, for 735*l*.) is inferior, and according to Northcote, was painted by Score, then one of Sir Joshua's journeymen. There is a replica (including only the upper part of the figure) in the possession of Mrs. Combe, of Edinburgh, and another, a full-length, in Lord Normanton's gallery, of the history of which I am not informed."—"Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds," by Charles Robert Leslie, R.A., continued and concluded by Tom Taylor, M.A. (London, 1865), vol. ii., p. 424—*note*.

* "Life of Reynolds," vol. ii., p. 362.

† Armstrong's "Thomas Gainsborough," p. 50.

THE BLUE BOY.

I.

IN 1770, Gainsborough exhibited at the Royal Academy three full-length portraits which were entered in the Catalogue as follows :

Thomas Gainsborough, R.A.
Bath.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| No. 83 Portrait of a lady and child, | } whole lengths.* |
| “ 84 A ditto of a gentleman, | |
| “ 85 A ditto of a young gentleman, | |

It is well known that one of these portraits produced a marked sensation. Miss Mary Moser, a founder member of the Royal Academy, writing to Fuseli, who was then in Rome, said :

“I suppose there has been a million of letters sent to Italy with an account of our Exhibition, so it will be only telling you what you know already, to say Reynolds was like himself in pictures which you have seen ; Gainsborough beyond himself in a portrait of a gentleman in a Vandyke habit ; and Zoffany superior to everybody in a portrait of Garrick in the character of Abel Drugger, with two other figures, Subtle and Face.”—Leslie and Taylor’s “Life and

*From the Catalogue in the British Museum.

Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds" (London, 1865), vol. i., p. 359.—John Thomas Smith, "Nollekens and his Times" (London, 1828), vol. i., p. 66.*

Of all Gainsborough's pictures the "Blue Boy" is probably the most celebrated, and one can readily understand Miss Moser's enthusiasm, if the "Blue Boy" was the object of her admiration, when she exclaims, "Gainsborough [was] beyond himself in a portrait of a gentleman in a Vandyke habit." It is not likely that there was more than one portrait, by Gainsborough, "in a Vandyke habit" in that exhibition, and if there were two, still there was only one in which Gainsborough was "beyond himself." Now, the picture that Miss Moser wrote about could not have been No. 83, for that was a portrait of a lady and child; it must, therefore, have been 84 or 85. All three of these portraits were full length; so that the picture Miss Moser was describing was a full-length portrait of a gentleman in a Vandyke habit. If she had said "young" gentleman the identification of the "Blue Boy" would have been complete. It must be remembered, however, that Miss Moser was not intent upon a minute description of the picture, but merely wanted to indicate, in a manner exact enough

* "Mrs. Nollekens was honoured with the friendship of three highly celebrated ladies, Miss Moser, R.A., the famous Painter of flowers, afterwards Mrs. Lloyd; Mrs. Angelica Kauffman, R.A., . . . and Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, the well-known translator of Epictetus."—"Nollekens and his Times," vol. i., p. 59.

for the occasion, the picture in which Gainsborough was "beyond himself." Now, the first printed description of the "Blue Boy" known to the writer is found in a book by Edward Edwards, an Associate of the Royal Academy, published twenty years after Gainsborough's death. It is as follows:

"A whole length Portrait of a young Gentleman, in a Vandyck dress, which picture obtained the title of the Blue Boy from the colour of the satin in which the figure is dressed."—"Anecdotes of Painters" (London, 1808), p. 140.

If we compare this description with that given by Miss Moser, bearing in mind that the official catalogue shows the 1770 portrait was "whole length," we find that, with the exceptions of the word "young" omitted by Miss Moser, and her saying "habit" instead of "dress," the two descriptions are precisely alike. Compare, now, Edwards' description of the "Blue Boy" with Gainsborough's memorandum of No. 85 in the catalogue of the 1770 Exhibition. The latter is, "Portrait of a young gentleman, whole length." If we add, "in a Vandyck dress," we have Edwards' description of the "Blue Boy" almost exactly word for word. In Gainsborough's memorandum, the words, "in a Vandyck dress," were not necessary. The dress spoke for itself. Inasmuch as Gainsborough painted no other portrait in a Vandyke habit that has become eminently famous, and since, in

the Exhibition of 1770, there was a portrait in a Vandyke habit by him in which he was "beyond himself," the conclusion seems reasonable that the "Blue Boy" was one of the wonders of that exhibition about which the "million of letters"—so to speak—were sent to Italy.

This opinion coincides with that of Mr. F. G. Stephens, the *Athenæum* art critic, as expressed in his historical note concerning the "Blue Boy" in the catalogue (p. 36) of the Exhibition of Gainsborough's Works at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885. Mr. Stephens says:

"Miss Mary Moser, R.A., writing to Fuseli, then in Rome, stated that it is 'only telling you what you know already of the Exhibition of 1770, to say that Gainsborough is beyond himself in the "Portrait of a Gentleman in a Vandyke habit."' That the 'Blue Boy' was thus referred to is more than probable, although the fact is incompatible with the commonly held opinion, that the picture was intended to expose the fallacy of the [eighth] discourse [of Sir Joshua Reynolds] delivered long after 1770." *

Mr. William Martin Conway, Roscoe Professor of Art, University College, Liverpool, and author of "The Artistic Development of Reynolds and Gainsborough" (London, 1886), at pages 63-64 of this work, expresses a similar opinion:

"Some of his [Gainsborough's] best pictures belong to

* The inexactness of Mr. Stephens' quotation from Miss Moser's letter does not change its sense, but makes it plainer.

the period intervening between 1770 and 1780. Foremost amongst these is the full-length portrait of Jonathan Buttal, world-renowned as the 'Blue Boy' (Grosv. No. 62). It is probably the 'Portrait of a Young Gentleman,' the 'Portrait of a Gentleman in a Van Dyck Habit,' exhibited by Gainsborough at the Royal Academy in 1770."

It must be remembered that Professor Conway was discussing the *date* of Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" and not the title of the picture as given in the exhibition catalogue of 1885.

What disposition was made by Gainsborough of the "Blue Boy" after its exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1770 (assuming now that it was exhibited at the Academy in that year) is not known; but it is known that subsequently the picture became the property of the Prince of Wales, afterwards George IV. The date of its acquisition by the Prince is not important; the fact of his once owning it is the material thing, and that is established by a bit of history contributed to Thornbury's "Life of Turner" by the Rev. Mr. Trimmer, a son of one of Turner's executors.*

* "The Rev. Mr. Trimmer (eldest son of the artist's [Turner's] oldest executor, of Marston on Bere, Staffordshire) I have to also warmly and especially thank for a MS. volume of recollections of Turner, whom he had known for forty years."—"Life of Turner," vol. i., p. vii.

"I cannot refrain from inserting some valuable reminiscences of

Mr. Trimmer writes:

"Many years ago resided at Heston a Mr. Nesbitt, a person of substance, in his younger days a companion of George, Prince of Wales. He once possessed Gainsborough's 'Blue Boy,' and in the following way: He was dining with the Prince of Wales. 'Nesbitt,' said the Prince, 'that picture shall be yours.' At first he thought he was joking, but finding he was decidedly serious, Nesbitt, who was an old beau of the very first water, made all suitable acknowledgment for his Royal Highness's generosity, and next morning the 'Blue Boy' arrived, followed in due time by a bill of 300*l*, which he had the satisfaction of paying. I heard him many years ago tell the story at my father's table."—"The Life of J. M. W. Turner, R.A." (London, 1862), vol. ii., p. 63.

The anecdote is characteristic of the spendthrift Prince, and Mr. Trimmer had it from Mr. Nesbitt himself.

The date of Mr. Nesbitt's purchase of the "Blue Boy" from the Prince of Wales is not given. It must, however, have been some time before 1802, for in that year Mr. Nesbitt's pictures were sold by

Turner's early and later contemporaries, kindly furnished me by his old friend, Mr. Trimmer."—*Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 57.

In the course of the ten pages of reminiscences of Gainsborough contributed here to the "Life of Turner," Mr. Trimmer says:

"From what I have said of Gainsborough, you will perceive that I rank him with the non-terrestrials. 'O deus certe.'—I place the English school thus—Gainsborough, Wilson, Turner, Reynolds, and then ten abreast at random.

"I place Gainsborough first because of his great originality. No one can copy him with success, and his genuine pictures pronounce themselves unmistakably."—Vol. ii., pp. 64–65.

auction, and the "Blue Boy" was among them. For reasons personal to himself, Mr. Nesbitt did not care to have his name connected with the advertisement of the auction, which took place at his London residence, 20 Grafton Street, Piccadilly, May 25, 1802.* In view of the very important relation which Mr. Nesbitt sustained to Gainsborough's "Blue Boy," it is desirable to know who he was, and what his taste and judgment were in pictorial art. According to the statement of Mr. J. Sewell in *Notes and Queries*, January 1, 1870, page 17,

"Further research to discover who Mr. Nesbitt was, has shown that he belonged to the Lismore family of Nesbitts; that he was the John Nesbitt, Esq., M.P., who for about twenty years represented in Parliament, either Winchelsea, Gatton, or Bodmin; that he inherited the property and fine old paintings of his uncle, Arnold Nesbitt, M.P. for Cricklade, who died in 1774; that his brother Arnold was chaplain to the Prince Regent; that the Prince and John Nesbitt were 'on the best of terms'; and that Mr. Nesbitt lived at Heston from about 1815 to 1820."

Mr. Nesbitt's position in the Art world may fairly be inferred from what the *Times* said of him and his

* "AUCTION SALES.

"Genuine Property—Select, uncommonly perfect, most beautiful and valuable Paintings.

"By PETER COXE, BURRELL and FOSTER.

"On the Premises, No. 20 Grafton Street, on Tuesday, May 25, at 12 o'clock, the Property of a Gentleman long distinguished for taste and judgment," etc.—The [London] *Times*, May 25, 1802.

Collection, the day preceding the auction sale. The *Times* of May 24, 1802, in an editorial article said :

“The very choice Collection of Paintings which are to be sold to-morrow on the premises, No. 20 Grafton Street, the upper end of Dover Street, Piccadilly, are of the very first description of Art. The Cabinet Picture of the immortal Rubens; . . . the two Cuyps; . . . the Vernet painted for Madame du Barry, the Guido, the Giorgione, Nicolo Poussin, Alexander Veronese, Terburg, Vandyke, Mignard, Gainsborough, and every other Picture prove the judgment of the Gentleman who collected them, whose well known taste fully justifies the eulogium passed upon the Pictures in the Descriptive Catalogue.”

The *Times* of the following day, under the head of “Auction Sales,” speaks of the Collection as “the Property of a Gentleman long distinguished for taste and judgment.” In the editorial column of the same issue, the *Times* says:

“To be able to possess perfection and to miss the golden opportunity would be a crime against taste and judgment, and now or never may be fairly argued in favour of the inestimable Pictures that Mr. Coxe has to sell this day on the premises, No. 20 Grafton Street, Piccadilly.”

Then follows a glowing recital of the list of superb works in the Collection, in the midst of which it asks, “Where so superior a Gainsborough in a fancied Portrait?”

And in the concluding sentence it is said, “This is indeed a day for the purchasing the finest works of Art.” Plainly, then, according to the *Times*, Mr.

Nesbitt not only possessed fine inherited pictures, but was himself a distinguished connoisseur, whose "well known taste fully justifies the eulogium passed upon the Pictures in the Descriptive Catalogue."

Now, the manner in which the "Gainsborough in a fancied Portrait" is set forth in the Descriptive Catalogue prepared for the auction is given by Mr. Sewell in *Notes and Queries*, January 1, 1870 :

"Through the courtesy and urbanity of the present head of the Lismore family, Alexander Nesbitt, Esquire, T. C., we are enabled to quote the following admirable description of the original 'Blue Boy' from a catalogue of his great-uncle's choice paintings and which speaks for itself :

"'No. 63 Gainsborough.—A whole-length Figure, with a fine Landscape in the Back-Ground. This most incomparable performance ranks this very celebrated Master among the First Class of Painters, Ancient and Modern. It has the Grace and Elegance of Vandyck in the Figure, with a Countenance as forcibly expressed and as rich as Murillo, with the Management of Titian. It is a picture which cannot be too highly spoken of or too much admired.'"

The question naturally arises, What became of the "Blue Boy" at the Nesbitt sale? A careful search of the files of the *Times* in the British Museum by Mr. R. English, an official of that institution, does not disclose the name of the purchaser, but Edwards' "Anecdotes of Painters" (1808) throws some light on the subject.* It says :

* Edwards died December 19, 1806 ; his "Anecdotes of Painters" was not published till 1808. The title page of that work reads: "Anec-

“It would be vain to attempt enumerating the pictures which this artist [Gainsborough] painted, yet the following short list may not be unentertaining or useless to the reader.

“A whole length Portrait of a young Gentleman in a Vandyck dress, which picture obtained the title of the ‘Blue Boy’ from the colour of the satin in which the figure is dressed. It is not exaggerated praise to say, that this portrait might stand among those of Vandyck. It is now in the possession of Mr. Hoppner, R.A.”—p. 140.

Thus we learn that, four years after the Nesbitt sale in 1802 (for Edwards died in 1806), the “Blue Boy” was in the possession of the well-known artist John Hoppner, R.A. But was Hoppner its owner? An answer is supplied by a letter of Hoppner’s son, Richard Belgrave Hoppner, addressed to his nephew, the Rev. Thomas Gifford Gallwey. It is dated June 7, 1872, and reads as follows:

“MY DEAR NEPHEW:

“I have just received your letters of the 20th May and 2nd June, enclosing copy of one from Mr. Sewell to you respecting a picture by Gainsborough, known as the *Blue Boy*. All I can say of the picture is, that I can perfectly remember it in my father’s house, 18, Charles Street, St. James’s Square, and I believe it was in my father’s custody for H. R. H., the Prince of Wales. How long it remained in my father’s house, or what became of it afterwards, I don’t dotes of Painters who have resided or been born in England; with Critical Remarks on their Productions by Edward Edwards deceased, Late Teacher of Perspective and Associate in the Royal Academy, Intended as a Continuation to the Anecdotes of Painting by the Late Horace Earl of Orford, London 1808.”

“Anecdotes of Painting,” however, is the title of the body of Edwards’ book, and is the running title.

know. As to the details of the picture's history from 1802 to 1815, during a great part of that time I was myself out of England, which may perhaps be the reason why I have so limited a recollection of it. My daughter, Madame de Tamarre, has a picture of a young lad, by Tiberio Tivelli, that I purchased at Venice half a century ago, which, if it is possible for Gainsborough to have seen it, I should say furnished him with the model for his picture. The boy, however, is in a brown dress.

“ Your affectionate Uncle,

[Signed] “ R. B. HOPPNER.” *

From this letter it clearly appears that, in the belief of the painter's son, John Hoppner was not the owner of the “ Blue Boy,” but was merely its trustee for the Prince of Wales, holding the picture subject to his disposition. What became of it? It certainly did not remain permanently a part of the Prince's Collection; nor is there any account known to the public that the Prince sold it to a private purchaser. If he had done so, would not the new owner have given special prominence to the fact that he got it from His Royal Highness? But the “ Blue Boy ” must have gone to somebody. Now a “ Blue Boy ” arrived at Mr. Nesbitt's residence at Heston in 1815 about the time when Mr. Nesbitt, having discharged his debts, was able to hold property in his own name again. The testimony of the widow Shortland, for many years a member of Nesbitt's household, is most ex-

* *Notes and Queries*, June 21, 1873, pp. 505-506.

plicit that a "Blue Boy" picture, subsequently recognized by her, was brought to Mr. Nesbitt's house soon after Mr. Nesbitt came to Heston; that it was hung in the parlour opposite the fireplace, and that it remained in Mr. Nesbitt's house until about the time he left Heston.* Mr. Sewell,† in his record of the identification of the "Blue Boy" as the picture that was for some years in Mr. Nesbitt's residence at Heston, says:

"From official sources we find that Nesbitt's affairs were settled about the close of 1814, or the beginning of 1815, by the sale of his life interest in an estate for the benefit of his creditors, and from local sources that he took up his residence at Heston in 1815, and that the 'Blue Boy' arrived there shortly afterwards, it was said, from the Palace. . . . This aged widow [Mrs. Shortland], having described the 'Blue Boy' with much accuracy to some of the parochial officials, was asked to go to London to see if she could recognise the green 'Blue Boy' as the picture she knew at Heston. This she did on March 9 [1871], accompanied by her grandson, and promptly recognised the 'Boy,' but not the frame in which he is now set, and rightly so, for the frame was changed after Nesbitt's sale. . . . The interview, as it may be called, between the widow and the 'Boy' was . . . quite like the meeting of two long-parted friends."—*Notes and Queries*, May 6, 1871, p. 392.

Now the "Blue Boy" having arrived at Nesbitt's house in Heston, one naturally asks, "Where did the

* *Notes and Queries*, May 6, 1871, p. 392.

† J. Sewell, Assoc. Institution of Civil Engineers, Eng.

picture come from?" According to the belief of John Hoppner's son, the "Blue Boy" belonged to the Prince of Wales. His possession of this painting a second time was probably for some other purpose than that which ordinarily attends the acquisition of works of art. Years before, the Prince had sold the picture to Mr. Nesbitt for a liberal price. When adversity came upon his friend, what would the Prince be likely to do? Do not all the circumstances of the case point to the conclusion that the Prince bought the picture for Mr. Nesbitt, that he kept it for him for several years, and that finally he sent it to him at Heston the moment that Nesbitt was released from his debts, and could hold the "Blue Boy" safe from attachment by his creditors?

Up to this date, then, the lineage of this picture may be summed up as follows: That it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1770; that it became afterwards the property of the Prince of Wales; that the Prince sold it to John Nesbitt; that it was one of Nesbitt's collection of paintings disposed of by auction May 25, 1802; that it was subsequently in the possession of John Hoppner, R.A., as custodian for the Prince of Wales; that early in 1815, when Nesbitt was discharged from his debts and liabilities, it was returned to him at Heston by the Prince of Wales.

From this time on there is no dispute concerning its lineage. The dates at which it passed into the hands of the different owners are not given with precision, although the order of succession is preserved. This important fact, however, seems to be established, that from 1815 to 1820 there was a "Blue Boy" in Mr. Nesbitt's possession, and another "Blue Boy" of substantially the same size and subject in the possession of Earl Grosvenor.*

About the year 1820, Mr. Nesbitt's affairs again became involved, his pictures were sold, and the "Blue Boy" became the property of William Hall, an auctioneer. This gentleman was an eccentric man who died in October, 1856. "Hall made a will, but it was, like himself, a peculiar one, and was disputed, first in Chancery and finally in the House of Lords. Under an order of the Court of Chancery his household effects were sold in March, 1858."† At this sale Mr. Dawson became the purchaser of the "Blue Boy," and subsequently sold it to Mr. J. Sewell of the Institution of Civil Engineers. In July, 1870, Mr. Sewell placed this picture in the hands of Messrs. Hogarth of London for sale. Messrs. Hogarth issued cards inviting their patrons to look at the picture. Below is a copy of their invitation :

* The size of the Grosvenor "Blue Boy" is 70 x 48 inches. The sight-size of the other is $71\frac{1}{2}$ x $50\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

† *Notes and Queries*, May 6, 1871.

“GAINSBOROUGH’S BLUE BOY.

“The favour of ————— is requested to View the above celebrated Picture, now exhibiting for Sale at

Messrs. HOGARTH’S

96 Mount Street, Grosvenor Square.”

At that time *Notes and Queries* published this notice :

“GAINSBOROUGH’S ‘BLUE BOY.’—We have been requested by Mr. Hogarth to explain that the picture which he has for sale, and for admission to see which he has issued cards of invitation, is not the one from the Grosvenor Gallery, the property of the Marquis of Westminster. Readers of ‘N & Q’ do not require to be reminded of the existence of a second ‘Blue Boy’ by Gainsborough.” *

Messrs. Hogarth sold the “Blue Boy” to Sir Joseph Hawley. On the death of the latter, it went to his brother Sir Henry Hawley, from whom it was purchased by Martin H. Colnaghi, Esq., who sold it to its present owner.

II.

THE Grosvenor House “Blue Boy” possesses this distinction, that it has a generally accepted and, so to speak, an officially proclaimed lineage; that lineage will be found in

* *Notes and Queries*, July 2, 1870, p. 18.

“A Catalogue of the Pictures at Grosvenor House, London; with Etchings from the whole Collection, executed by Permission of the Noble Proprietor, and accompanied by Historical Notices of the Principal Works, by John Young, Engraver in Mezzotinto to His Majesty, and Keeper of the British Institution.”

This catalogue was published in London, May 12, 1820. The particular picture now under consideration is No. 16 in the catalogue, and is mentioned in the following terms:

“GAINSBOROUGH

“PORTRAIT OF MASTER BUTTALL,

“Better known under the name of the Blue Boy.

“This Picture was painted in consequence of a dispute between Gainsborough, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and several other Artists. The former having asserted that he thought the predominant colour in a Picture ought to be blue; the others were of opinion that it was not possible to produce a fine Picture on such a principle; and the Artist in consequence painted this Portrait as an illustration of his opinion. It was considered that he had proved his assertion; and his performance having excited great attention, and become a general theme of praise with the Artists of that day, tended much to enhance the reputation he had already acquired.

“This Picture was purchased at Mr. Buttall’s sale by Mr. Nesbit; it became afterwards the property of Mr. Hoppner, who disposed of it to Earl Grosvenor.”

It is quite possible that Young is in error in his statement that “this picture was painted in consequence of a dispute between Gainsborough, Sir Joshua Reynolds and several other Artists.” No ac-

count of it appears in Fulcher's "Life of Gainsborough," nor in Leslie and Taylor's "Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds." Moreover, if Gainsborough ever said that "the predominant colour in a Picture ought to be blue," he certainly did not practice this theory in his usual manner of painting. Perhaps Young had in mind Sir Joshua Reynolds' celebrated Eighth Discourse, sometimes called his "Cold Colour Discourse," delivered before the students of the Royal Academy, on the occasion of the distribution of prizes, December 10, 1778. Sir Joshua then said :

"It ought, in my opinion, to be indispensably observed that the masses of light in a picture be always of a warm mellow colour, yellow, red, or a yellowish-white; and that the blue, the grey, or the green colours be kept almost entirely out of these masses, and be used only to support and set off these warm colours; and for this purpose, a small proportion of cold colours will be sufficient.

"Let this conduct be reversed; let the light be cold and the surrounding colours warm, as we often see in the works of the Roman and Florentine painters, and it will be out of the power of art, even in the hands of Rubens or Titian, to make a picture splendid and harmonious."—Beechy's "Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds" (London, 1878), vol. i., p. 454.

It is by no means improbable that Sir Joshua, when he laid down his indispensable law about the use of "cold colours" in painting, had some person in mind—some artist of celebrity, whose paintings were greatly admired, but whose color scheme he greatly disap-

proved. It is quite possible, even, that he had in mind a certain famous picture which embodied in a striking manner the faults that he warned his students to avoid. Such a picture would be Gainsborough's "Blue Boy,"—the painting that was probably the subject of Mary Moser's praise as the "portrait of a gentleman in a Vandyke habit," in the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1770. The years that had elapsed since that exhibition may have led Sir Joshua to believe that a censure expressed in general terms, even if it recalled Gainsborough's celebrated painting, would, nevertheless, be regarded as free from intended personality. As is well known, Reynolds and Gainsborough were rivals in their profession, and their private relations far from friendly. On one occasion, at a Royal Academy dinner, the President sought to disparage Gainsborough's recognized rank in portraiture by proposing the health of Thomas Gainsborough, "Our greatest living landscape painter,"—a sentiment which provoked Wilson's well-known blunt retort that brought an apology from Sir Joshua; although that apology was tendered because he had overlooked Wilson's presence, and not because he had omitted to recognize his rival's rank as a portrait painter. The fact is, there was an inborn temperamental antagonism between these men. Allan Cunningham, after mentioning Gainsborough's failure to complete his portrait of Sir Joshua, says:

“Some unnatural fit of good will had brought them together; on reflection, they separated, and continued to speak of one another after their own natures; Gainsborough with open scorn, Reynolds with courteous, cautious insinuation.” —“British Painters” vol. i., p. 243.

Considering, then, the personal and professional relations between them, is it likely that any sensitive regard for Sir Joshua’s feelings would have prevented Gainsborough from exhibiting his picture wherever he pleased? And if this picture was Gainsborough’s superb reply to Sir Joshua, what place in all London could have been more appropriate and more telling for its display than the Royal Academy where the President had delivered his “Cold Colour Discourse”? But no record is found of such an exhibition. That fact in itself is strong presumptive evidence that Gainsborough’s “Blue Boy” was not painted for the purpose that Young and others have supposed.

The statement also that the “Blue Boy” is the “Portrait of Master Buttall” is, to say the least, of doubtful authenticity. It is true that Edwards in his “Anecdotes of Painters” mentions a picture by Gainsborough that “obtained the title of the Blue Boy from the colour of the satin in which the figure is dressed,” and in a foot note says: “This was the Portrait of a Master Buttall, whose father was a very considerable ironmonger in Greek street, Soho.”

Young may have borrowed his statement from Ed-

wards and applied it to the Earl's picture, but when he did so, he took the chance of adopting a possible mistake. Before Young's catalogue was published and while the picture was in the Earl's possession, it was exhibited at the British Institution in 1814, and it then bore neither the title of the "Blue Boy" nor "Portrait of Master Buttall." It was catalogued:

"Portrait of a Youth
Possessor, Earl Grosvenor." *

In 1834, it was again exhibited at the British Institution, and on that occasion it was catalogued:

"Selection from the Grosvenor Gallery:
By Thomas Gainsborough.
No. 117. A Young Gentleman in a Landscape.
The Picture known as the Boy in Blue." †

It was not until the Manchester Exhibition of 1857 that the Grosvenor House picture bore in public the dual title—"The Blue Boy (Master Buttall)." ‡

In regard to the latter name given to this picture, Mr. J. Sewell has thrown some light by an investi-

* "An Account of all the Pictures exhibited in the rooms of the British Institution from 1813 to 1823 belonging to the Nobility and Gentry of England, London, 1824."—Transcript by Mr. R. English, British Museum.

† Catalogue, p. 13.—Transcript by Mr. R. English, British Museum.

‡ "Catalogue of the Art Treasures of the United Kingdom collected at Manchester in 1857. Saloon D.—No. 156. The Blue Boy (Master Buttall).

"Painted to disprove the opinion of Sir Joshua Reynolds that the predominance of blue in a picture is incompatible with a good effect of colour. Lent by the Marquis of Westminster."—Transcript by Mr. R. English, British Museum.

gation made by him or his representatives, of which an account is given in *Notes and Queries*, June 14, 1873, p. 486. It is as follows:

“Research and inquiry have shown that there were two Jonathan Buttalls—father and son—but have failed as yet to discover that the younger Buttall had any offspring, or that any child was born to either the elder or the younger Buttall between 1727 and 1796. But it was found that in 1727, the year in which Gainsborough was born, the elder Buttall was a vestryman and overseer of St. Ann’s, Soho, a position rarely held by any one under thirty. . . .”

Sir Joshua’s Discourse was delivered December 10, 1778. At that time Gainsborough was fifty-one years old. Assuming that Mr. Sewell’s investigation was correct, how old was “Master Buttall” in 1778? As no child was born to the elder Buttall after 1727, his son, “Master Buttall,” must have been in 1778 a youth of at least fifty-one years of age. Nor could the “Blue Boy” have been the portrait of a son of the second Buttall, for “Research and inquiry . . . have failed as yet to discover that the younger Buttall had any offspring.” But if Gainsborough and young Buttall were boyhood friends, might not Gainsborough have painted the portrait of his young companion from memory? The slightest study of the “Blue Boy” will answer that question. That gracious, well-bred, manly youth, full of gentle spirit and soldierly grace, with a vitality that breathes

and thinks and almost speaks, could only have been painted from a living model, and not from the phantom of the artist's brain. As we look upon this beautiful portrait, we cannot help a feeling of regret that so lovable and gallant a lad, immortalized by Gainsborough's brush, should go down to posterity without personal identity and an authenticated name.

It has been claimed by some writers that Young's historical notice of the Grosvenor House picture is supported by later authorities in art, as Allan Cunningham, 1833, Mrs. Jameson, 1844, and George Williams Fulcher, 1856. An examination of what these writers have said about this picture puts their statements in a very different light from that in which they have commonly been regarded. As far as Allan Cunningham is concerned, it must be said in fairness to him, that, at the time his book was published, there was no other "Blue Boy" known to be in existence, to attract public attention, to challenge comparison, and to test the accuracy of Young's history of the Grosvenor House picture. That picture was then the undisputed claimant for sole, original honors. Inasmuch as Cunningham did not undertake to give its lineage, there was no apparent necessity for him to make a thorough examination of the facts in order that he might set

forth an authentic history. He therefore simply says :

“*After experiencing a variety of fortune,** the far famed ‘Blue Boy’ (the portrait of a youth in a blue dress), and the still more celebrated ‘Cottage Door,’ found their way into the gallery of Lord Grosvenor.”—“British Painters” (London, 1879), vol. i., p. 276.

Mrs. Jameson, however, is quite a different kind of historian. The sources of her information are easily recognized. In her book entitled “Private Picture Galleries,” published in 1844, on page 276, she gives the following description and history of the Grosvenor House picture :

“*The Grosvenor Gallery.*”

“No. 137. The Blue Boy.—The Portrait of a son of Mr. Buttall. Full length, standing, in a blue satin dress. Landscape background. After the death of this gentleman, it was purchased by Mr. Nesbitt, and was afterwards in the possession of Mr. Hoppner, the painter, who sold it to Earl Grosvenor.

“This celebrated picture owes its origin to a dispute between Gainsborough and other artists. Gainsborough’s object was practically to disprove the opinion of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who thought that the predominance of blue in a picture was incompatible with good effect of colour. Gainsborough has certainly *proved his assertion ; and his performance having excited great attention and become a general theme of praise with the artists of that day, tended much to enhance the reputation he had already acquired.* The effect

* The italics are ours.

of the rich glowing background, with its broken lights, is farther enhanced by the cold blue dress."

With the exception of the last sentence and of an occasional paraphrase, the whole article is taken bodily from Young's catalogue, and in the passage we have italicised, Mrs. Jameson has copied Young word for word, and without acknowledgment.

George Williams Fulcher is another writer whose remarks about this picture are occasionally quoted as authoritative history. In his "Life of Thomas Gainsborough," published in 1856 (pp. 111-112), the author says :

"Early in the year 1779, Gainsborough probably painted that full length portrait of a son of Mr. Buttall, which is usually known as *The Blue Boy*. Sir Joshua Reynolds had maintained in one of his Discourses, 'that the masses of light in a picture should be always of a warm mellow color, yellow, red or a yellowish white; and that the blue, the grey, or the green colors, should be kept almost entirely out of these masses, and be used only to support and set off these warm colors.' To refute the President's objection to blue in the mass, Gainsborough clothed Master Buttall in a dress approaching to cerulean splendor."

At page 198, he says : "At Mr. Buttall's death the 'Blue Boy' was purchased by Mr. Nesbitt; the picture was afterwards in the possession of Mr. Hoppner, the painter, who sold it to the first Earl Grosvenor."

Does not this account of the lineage of this picture have an old familiar sound? Fulcher evidently wrote

his history with Mrs. Jameson's book before him, for he has not only copied the substance, but in the passage italicised by us above, he has copied the very words used by her in her "Private Picture Galleries." Another coincidence may be observed, that Fulcher has followed the precedent set by Mrs. Jameson, and neglected to acknowledge the source of his information.

But Fulcher is not the only authority for the statement that Hoppner sold the "Blue Boy" to the first Earl Grosvenor. The present catalogue of the Duke of Westminster's pictures, published in 1888, contains the following entry :

"70. Thomas Gainsborough.

"Born, 1727; died, 1788.

"Full-length portrait of Master Buthall, in a landscape; considered by the artist to be his finest portrait; and celebrated at the time under the name of 'the Blue Boy.'

"At Mr. Buthal's death, this picture was sold to Mr. Nesbit, and was afterwards in the possession of Mr. Hoppner the painter, till he sold it to the first Earl Grosvenor."

Now, the first Earl Grosvenor died August 5, 1802. Nesbitt's sale took place May 25, 1802. If Hoppner sold the "Blue Boy" to the first Earl Grosvenor, he must have done so between these two dates. But Edwards, in his "Anecdotes of Painting," published in 1808, page 140, says of the "Blue Boy":

"*It is now in the possession of Mr. Hoppner, R.A.*"*

* The italics are ours.

As a contemporary of John Hoppner, an Associate of the Royal Academy, and a writer on art matters, it is not likely that Edwards would have made such a positive statement about the "Blue Boy" if the statement had not been true. It is fair to state that Edwards died in 1806, two years before his book was issued from the press. No correction of his statement, however, was made by the editor, and it must therefore stand as true in 1806, and probably true at the date of the publication of the book.

But could Edwards have been mistaken after all? A bit of circumstantial evidence, curiously furnished by Hoppner himself, seems to confirm Edwards' assertion. In February, 1809, one year before he died, Hoppner criticised severely Edwards' book in the *Quarterly Review* of that date. The contemptuous and bitter feeling he had for the author is evidenced by some short extracts from his article.

"The flippant remarks of fine ladies are occasionally quoted also by this gallant author, as decisive against works of high classical pretensions; and, among other pleasantries, we are told of the 'Moppings of Gainsborough,' and of 'Dr. Burney's dabbling with a party of naked girls in a horse pond.' . . . We can neither commend the taste, nor the patriotism of the man, who could prefer commemorating the violence of party, and raking in the annals of . . . beer houses, to the luxury of paying a just tribute to the talents of his contemporaries."

After this, does anybody suppose that Hoppner

would have remained silent if he had caught Edwards making a statement about his possession of the "Blue Boy" that was not true? Would not Hoppner have been delighted to expose Edwards' ignorance about ordinary incidents known to all the art world except the man who had written a book on "Anecdotes of Painting"? Hoppner did no such thing. He remained silent. The plain conclusion is, that he did have possession of the "Blue Boy" in 1806, and probably as late as the date of Edwards' book.

Just how Hoppner could have owned the picture in 1806 and at the same time have sold it to the first Earl Grosvenor in 1802 is a question that we are not called upon to solve here.

Young concludes his historical notice of the Grosvenor House "Blue Boy," in these concise terms :

"This picture was purchased at Mr. Buttall's sale by Mr. Nesbit; it became afterwards the property of Mr. Hoppner, who disposed of it to Earl Grosvenor."

Mr. Nesbitt, as we have seen, said, in the presence of the Rev. Mr. Trimmer, that he bought his "Blue Boy" from the Prince of Wales. John Hoppner's son, R. B. Hoppner, says, "I believe it [the "Blue Boy"] was in my father's custody for H. R. H. the Prince of Wales." If Hoppner was the custodian and not the owner of the picture, to have "disposed

of it to Earl Grosvenor" would have been a breach of trust, for which there is no ground for belief in any act of Hoppner's life.

Summing up, then, these several contributions to the history of the lineage of the Grosvenor House "Blue Boy," we may fairly say: Fulcher copies Mrs. Jameson; Mrs. Jameson copies John Young; Young copies a foot-note from Edwards, though otherwise he is original. And yet, as we have seen, it is mainly upon Young's catalogue, that the claim of this picture rests of being the "Portrait of Master Buttall" and the original "Blue Boy" of Thomas Gainsborough.

III.

BEFORE concluding this sketch, the writer has thought it proper to supplement it with some extracts from articles concerning both pictures that have appeared from time to time in the London journals and other publications.

The picture now exhibited emerged from comparative obscurity in 1867. In that year it was exhibited by Mr. J. Sewell, its owner, at the *Conversazione* of the Institution of Civil Engineers. Its seclusion for thirty-six years, while in the hands of William Hall,

is not surprising, when we consider the reputation of that eccentric man. Its appearance, on the occasion referred to, marks the beginning of a protracted controversy as to the relative standing of this picture and the "Blue Boy" of the Duke of Westminster. The great interest which the present picture evoked was further stimulated by the Exhibition of the Grosvenor House picture at the Royal Academy in 1870. The periodicals of the day took up the subject. Articles concerning both Blue Boys were published in the *Athenæum*, the *Graphic*, the *Queen*, the *Art Journal*, and *Notes and Queries*.

The *Athenæum* of August 28, 1869, published an editorial, under the title, "Fine Arts—Gainsborough's Blue Boy." It said :

"There are it seems two 'Blue Boys' in the field, each claiming to be a Gainsborough, and to be also a first class work of art; yet not mere copies of each other, more especially in the artistic, symmetrical and landscape feature of the pictures; the less known being the better finished one in all these accessories.

"One of them is in the possession of the Marquis of Westminster, and is well known from its public exhibitions, and also by the fine engraving of it published by Messrs. Graves, Pall Mall. The other, after a lengthened obscurity in the hands of a Mr. Hall, an eccentric but wealthy admirer of Gainsborough's works, was sold after his death, without direct heirs, about ten or twelve years ago, and was exhibited at the annual *Conversazione* of the Institution of Civil-Engineers, in 1867, by its present possessor. . . .

“It further appears that a correct history of ‘The Blue Boy’ is still a desideratum, as the usual history associated with the Westminster picture is neither complete nor trustworthy, and that considerable obscurity prevails as regards its history, from the time of leaving Gainsborough’s studio up to the time when one ‘Blue Boy’ found its way into the Grosvenor Gallery, and another into the possession of the late Mr. Hall.”

The [London] *Graphic* of December 8, 1869, pages 58 and 59, says :

“It begins to seem more than likely that the Blue Boy in the Grosvenor Gallery has a twin brother. . . . This second Dromio has just been hung at South Kensington, and there awaits the verdict of the connoisseurs.

“. . . When the best judges have already decided that the Blue Boy No. 2 is more gracefully drawn than the Blue Boy No. 1, that the colouring of the former is clearer than the latter and the character of the face more pleasing, and that the minutest touches of the subordinate parts are palpably Gainsborough’s, a case is quite made out for the new claimant, and the two pictures should be as soon as possible hung side by side in South Kensington in broad daylight, and open to the keenest scrutiny.

“If this newly discovered picture is not by Gainsborough, by whom is it? Who could imitate the wonderful bravura, who could have made the red blood glow through those brown cheeks? Who could vivify those keen intelligent eyes? The face is rather smooth, but it is not from the hand of Du Pont. It is too graceful for Wilson, the portrait painter. It is beyond what Romney or Hoppner could have done; as for Beechey, he only imitated Gainsborough’s landscapes.

“Is the second Blue Boy to remain an endless crux for modern art-critics?”

The *Queen*, April 30, 1870, on page 268, published an editorial article under the title, "Description of our Coloured Picture—The Blue Boy.—By Thomas Gainsborough." After repeating the substance of the popular story of the lineage of the Grosvenor House picture, it said :

"Until this last year, the fact that there were two 'Blue Boys' was not generally known. But, as nowadays there is always something astonishing turning up, or some especial article of faith ruthlessly swept away, the 'Blue Boy' is not exempt from what appears to have become the general rule. The question as to which is the original and which the replica has been argued with great spirit in our contemporary, *Notes and Queries*. For many years the Marquis of Westminster's picture was the unchallenged claimant of the original honours. . . . But at the conversazione of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1867, after a lifetime's obscurity in private hands, a second Blue-clad Boy formed one of the works of art lent for exhibition."

In 1885 the Grosvenor House "Blue Boy" appeared at the Old Masters' Winter Exhibition held at the Grosvenor Gallery. The Exhibition was mainly composed of the works of Thomas Gainsborough and was under the management of Sir Coutts Lindsay, Bart., Director, and Mr. J. Comyns Carr and Mr. C. E. Hallé, Assistant Directors. The historical and illustrative notes in the catalogue were prepared by Mr. F. G. Stephens, the Art critic of the *Athenæum*. On page 5 of the catalogue of the Exhibition there is the following notice :

“Sir Coutts Lindsay and the Directors of the Grosvenor Gallery desire to express their thanks to the owners of works by Thomas Gainsborough for the readiness with which many of the most famous and valued productions of the master have been entrusted to them for the present exhibition.

“They likewise take this occasion of recording their indebtedness to Mr. Algernon Graves and Mr. McKay, who have assisted them in tracing many of the Artist’s works, as well as to Mr. F. G. Stephens, who has kindly supplied the historical and illustrative notes accompanying the catalogue.”

Mr. Stephens had supplied the notes accompanying the catalogue of the exhibition of the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds the year before, and was thanked for them at that time by the Directors in the same terms. That Mr. Stephens was entrusted with the task of furnishing the notes for two such important exhibitions as these sufficiently attests the esteem in which his attainments and judgment were held by Sir Coutts Lindsay and the Assistant Directors.

Professor Conway, in a prefatory note to “The Artistic Development of Reynolds and Gainsborough” (London, 1886), says :

“The published Catalogues of those Exhibitions [at the Grosvenor Gallery in the years 1884 and 1885] cannot fail to maintain a permanent place in the literature of English Art.”

At page 35 of the Catalogue is entered the Grosvenor House “Blue Boy.” The passages quoted be-

low are taken from Mr. Stephens' historical notes; the foot-notes are ours.

"62. MASTER JONATHAN BUTTALL, 'THE BLUE BOY.' Lent by the Duke of Westminster, K.G.

"Master Jonathan Buttall was the son of Mr. Jonathan Buttall, an ironmonger in an extensive way of business, living at 31, Greek Street (at the corner of King Street), Soho, between 1728 (if not before) and 1768, when he died. According to the 'Book for a Rainy Day,' p. 302,* he was 'an immensely rich man.' The younger Buttall continued in the business of his father† until 1796, when his effects were sold by Sharpe & Coxe, the well-known auctioneers.

. . . It has been asserted that a 'Blue Boy' (for there can hardly be a doubt that more than one version of the work exists) was sold on this occasion.‡ Much controversy has been continued over a considerable period, when the right of this picture to be the original version was discussed. It has been averred that a 'Blue Boy' was at the Academy Exhibition in 1770, as No. 85, 'Portrait of a Young Gentleman,' a whole-length figure which attracted much attention.

"A story has been credited that the 'Blue Boy' was produced by Gainsborough to refute a dictum of Sir Joshua Reynolds, delivered in his Eighth Discourse to the students of the Royal Academy, December 10, 1778: 'It ought, in my opinion, to be indispensably observed, that the masses of

* "A Book for a Rainy Day: or Recollections of the Events of the Years 1766-1833. By John Thomas Smith, Late Keeper of the Prints and Drawings in the British Museum."

† If the younger Buttall in 1768 "continued in the business of his father," he must have been in 1779, when Gainsborough, according to Fulcher, is said to have painted the "Blue Boy," a man of affairs and not the youth we see in the picture.

‡ Mr. Stephens' doubt is suggestive. If "a 'Blue Boy'" was not sold at the Buttall sale, by what known link is the Grosvenor House version of the "Blue Boy" connected with the Buttalls?

light in a picture be always of a warm, mellow colour, yellow, red, or a yellowish-white; and that the blue, the grey, or the green colours be kept almost entirely out of these masses, and be used only to support and set off these warm colours; and for this purpose, a small proportion of cold colours will be sufficient. Let the conduct be reversed; let the light be cold and the surrounding colours warm, as we often see in the works of the Roman and Florentine painters, and it will be out of the power of art, even in the hands of Rubens or Titian, to make a picture splendid and harmonious.'

"It is obvious that the Eighth Discourse may have been delivered covertly to depreciate the picture which had been exhibited eight years before, but this is not likely;* or it may be assumed that the picture was produced to demonstrate the futility of the President's counsel. Miss Mary Moser, R.A., writing to Fuseli, then in Rome, stated that it is 'only telling you what you know already of the Exhibition of 1770, to say that Gainsborough is beyond himself in the "Portrait of a Gentleman in a Vandyke habit."' That the 'Blue Boy' was thus referred to is more than probable, although the fact is incompatible with the commonly held opinion, that the picture was intended to expose the fallacy of the discourse delivered long after 1770. Fulcher and others, on the contrary, reported that it was probably not till early in 1779 this work was produced. In this Hazlitt, Lawrence, Leslie, and Waagen agree, but they did not apply their attention to other circumstances than the evident antagonism of the artists and the great merit of the painting. The picture is believed to have been in the possession of Hoppner, R.A., as a trust on behalf of the Prince of Wales,†

* "Knowing what we do of Reynolds, it seems to me almost certain that he had Gainsborough in his mind when he composed the above sentences. . . ."—Walter Armstrong, "Thomas Gainsborough," p. 47.

† That a "Blue Boy" was in the possession of Hoppner, R.A., is one

or as his own property. See a letter [pp. 18, 19 *supra*] from Hoppner's son, Mr. R. B. Hoppner, stating his belief that the 'Blue Boy' he remembered at his father's house, 18, Charles Street, St. James's Square, was the property of the Prince.

"The whole subject of the relative standing of this picture and more than one version of it—to say nothing of what relates to numerous copies—is so very obscure and confused that it cannot be discussed here. The version most favoured in opposition to the present work belonged, it is said, to Mr. Nesbitt,* of Heston, and passed to the hands of Mr. W. Hall, whose affairs getting into confusion, his effects were, in 1856, sold to Mr. Dawson, who endeavoured, unsuccessfully, to sell the picture to the late Earl Grosvenor. At Hall's sale this version was described as 'A Portrait of the Prince of Wales.' The example before us is undoubtedly authentic, and was exhibited long before its rival was recognized.†

"The respective claims of these works were amply discussed in 'The Times,' 'The Queen,' and 'Notes and Queries,' Fourth Series, vols. iii., iv., v., vi., vii., viii., ix., xi., and xii. The picture now on view is presumed to be

of the best established facts of "Blue Boy" history; that this picture was held by Hoppner as custodian for the Prince of Wales is almost equally certain. But which "Blue Boy" was it that Hoppner had? John Young, in his "Catalogue of the Pictures at Grosvenor House" (1820), dedicated to the second Earl Grosvenor, does not connect the Grosvenor House version of the "Blue Boy" with the Prince of Wales, and yet another of the best established facts in "Blue Boy" history is, that a "Blue Boy" was owned for a time by the Prince of Wales and subsequently sold to Nesbitt. The reader can recall the evidence tracing the "Blue Boy" to Nesbitt and the Prince of Wales by turning to pages 13, 14 and 18 *supra*.

* That Nesbitt got his "Blue Boy" from the Prince of Wales (subsequently George IV.), see the Rev. Mr. Trimmer's contribution to "Thornbury's Life of Turner" (p. 14 *supra*).

† "Its rival," during the thirty-six years it was in the hands of Mr. Hall, was not publicly exhibited.

that mentioned by E. Edwards in his 'Anecdotes,' 1808, 140; in Fulcher's 'Life of Gainsborough,' 1856, 113 and 202; Cunningham's 'Lives of the Painters,' &c., 1830, i., 353, and Mrs. Jameson's 'Companion to the Private Galleries,' &c., iii., 276. The last-named writer stated that after But-
tall's death the picture was bought 'by Mr. Nesbit, and was afterwards in the possession of Mr. Hoppner, who sold it to Earl Grosvenor.' Mrs. Jameson doubtless learnt this from the then owner of the picture.* Cunningham averred that it had passed through many changes ere it became part of the Grosvenor Gallery and the property of the late Marquis of Westminster.†

"It is obvious that Gainsborough might, and probably did, find occasion to illustrate a principle which is apparently opposed to the dictum of Reynolds, without reference to the Eighth Discourse or previous utterance of the P.R.A. . . .

"The picture before us is known to have been exhibited at the British Institution with a collection of Gainsborough's works—the first formed independently of the artist and his

* If Mr. Stephens had had Young's catalogue (previously mentioned) before him, at the time he wrote his notes, he would not have been obliged to conjecture the source of Mrs. Jameson's information. Mrs. Jameson copied John Young—in considerable parts, word for word.

† More precisely, "after experiencing a variety of fortune" it found its way into the gallery of Lord Grosvenor. The implication in Cunningham's words seems to be, that the Grosvenor version of the "Blue Boy" had been in the possession not only of various owners, but of owners in various conditions of life; ups and downs are implied in "a variety of fortune." Cunningham's mention of the "Blue Boy" is of the briefest. He does not attempt to sketch its history.

Professor William Martin Conway (Roscoe Professor of Art, University College, Liverpool), speaking of the Grosvenor "Blue Boy," says:

"It is a matter for great regret that, since the time when the picture was last exhibited, it should have seriously deteriorated, whether owing to injudicious treatment or from some unavoidable cause."—"The Artistic Development of Reynolds and Gainsborough" (London, 1886), p. 64.

wife—in 1814, under the title of ‘Portrait of a Youth,’ and again, at the same place, in 1834, as ‘117, A Young Gentleman in a Landscape; the Picture Known as the Boy in Blue.’ It was at Manchester in 1857; the International Exhibition in 1862; and at the Royal Academy in 1870. The last occasion evoked the discussion above alluded to when the other ‘Blue Boy’ became prominent. The question may be summed up by saying that probably the younger Buttall had a version of his own portrait, while the Prince had another.”

It will be observed that, in the Grosvenor Gallery notice, there is no assumption nor claim that the Westminster “Blue Boy” is the original version. On the contrary, there is a distinct acknowledgment that the question, which version is the original picture, is unsettled. “The whole subject,” Mr. Stephens says, “is so very obscure and confused that it cannot be discussed here.”

Apparently, the most that the Grosvenor Gallery notice claims for the Westminster version is, that it “is undoubtedly authentic, and was exhibited long before its rival was recognized.” The author of the historical notice of the Westminster picture in the exhibition of 1885, could not be expected to discriminate against it in favor of a rival.

It is interesting, in conclusion, to compare the description of the “Blue Boy” in the sale catalogue of 1802 with the critical opinion of Richard J. Lane,

R.A.E., a grand-nephew of Gainsborough,* concerning the "Blue Boy" now for the first time exhibited in America. The sale catalogue is as follows:

"No. 63 Gainsborough.—A whole-length Figure, with a fine Landscape in the Back-Ground. This most incomparable performance ranks this very celebrated Master among the First Class of Painters, Ancient and Modern. It has the Grace and Elegance of Vandyck in the Figure, with a Countenance as forcibly expressed, and as rich as Murillo, with the Management of Titian."—Catalogue.

Of this "Blue Boy" Mr. Lane wrote:

"The figure is more elegant than the Grosvenor picture—the colouring clearer—the character of the face far more pleasing—the minutest touches of the subordinate parts palpably Gainsboro's." †

Little more need now be said. Which of the two paintings was first in point of time may never perhaps be settled with absolute certainty. Which is the superior in quality competent judges may determine. The pictures speak for themselves.

* "His [Mr. Lane's] peculiar delicacy and tenderness of touch were conspicuous in his pencil and chalk sketches, of which he executed a large number, representing most of the best known people of the day. . . . In 1864 . . . he became director of the etching class in the science and art department at South Kensington, and retained the post almost till his death, which took place on 21 Nov., 1872."—"Dictionary of National Biography."

"He [Mr. Lane] has copied and published some two dozen of these fine sketches [of Gainsborough's], and he ought to publish more."—Allan Cunningham, "British Painters" (London, 1879), vol. i., p. 278.

Probably there has been no critic better qualified to judge of the genuineness of a work attributed to Gainsborough than Mr. Lane.

† *Notes and Queries*, 4th Series, vol. vii., March 18, 1871, p. 240.



